



Anger Without Aggression

Chances are that each day you'll bump up against some person or event that causes frustration. What do you do with your anger when it arises? Do you stuff it down, hide it or deny it? Do you lose control and dump your anger on those around you? Either of these extremes can be destructive – but there is a middle ground.

It may be hard to think of angry feelings as separate from acts of aggression because the two are so closely connected. But anger and aggression are actually separate functions, and differentiating between the two is essential. By staying in touch with your feelings of anger, without engaging in acts of aggression, you can learn new information about yourself – what you like, need or want, and what is important to you.

Anger is an emotion that occurs naturally when we're confronted with an injustice or when we experience frustration in reaching a goal or fulfilling a need. Because our culture links anger with aggression, many of us – especially women – are taught that anger, in and of itself, is wrong. But like happiness or sadness, anger is a normal part of human experience.

It is aggression – behavior that harms people or property – that causes problems, not anger. When we jump from anger right into aggression we not only can become dangerous and hurtful, we miss out on the chance to explore what our anger is trying to tell us. Anger helps us decide to set new boundaries, address important issues and ask for what we need, to name just a few benefits. Here are some ways you can let your anger lead you to constructive, rather than destructive, acts:

Safety First!

Learning to discriminate between anger and aggression is crucial to staying safe while staying connected to your emotions. Be aware of any knee-jerk reactions that lead you to respond immediately by striking out, either verbally or physically. Plan how you will avoid acting on these dangerous impulses. If you need to "put away" your anger to avoid losing control, be sure to take a break to get some distance from your emotions.

Alternatives That Work

Perhaps keeping your anger under control is not the problem – it's finding and recognizing your anger. Physical or verbal exercises can help you. Tearing up an old phone book or pounding nails into wood lets your body lead the way into your emotions. Or you might prefer exercise-related activities, like jogging, kicking a soccer ball or shooting hoops. If you favor verbal release over physical, journaling is your key to releasing anger. Grab a pen and notebook and let the words flow. You can even use a tape recorder if writing slows you down too much.

What Does It Mean?

What is your anger telling you about your situation, your relationships, yourself? Take the time to sort out the specifics of what has raised your ire, and identify any patterns. Ask yourself:

- When and why do I find myself becoming angry?
- What want or need is being frustrated when I feel angry?
- What part of this do I have control over?
- What change do I need or want, in myself or others, to prevent anger being triggered in the future?

By tolerating the discomfort you experience when your anger surfaces you can glean important, life-changing information. In the future, let your anger work for you, rather than against others.

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